



# CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

## **Commentary: A Farm Bill for the 21st century**

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By A.G. Kawamura

California agriculture never ceases to amaze me with its innovation, cutting-edge technology and diversity. As the fifth largest agricultural economy in the world, California feeds the nation and the world with a wide variety of commodity and specialty crops. California's farmers and ranchers also embrace the importance of school gardens in the urban and rural communities and the research and development of bio-fuels as a mainstream energy source.

All in all, California's agricultural future will take us to exciting new realms and continue to be something for the world to admire.

As secretary of food and agriculture, I look for policies that will build the 21st century platform for California's agricultural progress while at the same time protecting our state's agricultural industry. The cornerstone of our national agricultural industry's progress lies with the entrepreneurial spirit of California farmers and ranchers. That is why Gov. Schwarzenegger assigned the Department of Food and Agriculture to lead the state's policy discussions on the 2007 Farm Bill. We want to hear from our farmers and ranchers about what is important to them and their economic future in this great state.

Within the Farm Bill budget is an opportunity for California's farmers and ranchers to secure the agricultural investments needed for the future while maintaining a dedication to the industry of today. This is why the 2007 Farm Bill is important to me, and I hope that it is important to you, as well.

Targeted investment in California agriculture can assist in combating childhood obesity and foster a healthier nation through a delicious and nutritious diet based on our diverse products. This is an example of the investments that the Farm Bill can deliver. However it is up to us to ensure that California's priorities for the future, and today, are incorporated into the upcoming Farm Bill.

The Farm Bill is a unique funding opportunity for California and the nation and we, as the largest agricultural state, need to tell our story. The U.S. Farm Bill sets national policy and programs critical to the progress of America's and California's farm and rural economy.

Decisions made in the next Farm Bill will set the direction for agriculture for the next five years. Your input, provided through California's listening sessions, will help explain California's priorities to Congress with the intention of increasing investment in our state's future.

In a perfect world this would be an easy task. However, we do face challenges in securing California's future through the Farm Bill process. As America's agricultural leader, California is seeking a proportional share of the nation's investment in agriculture.

In 2004, for example, California exceeded 22 states combined in agricultural production, but received about one-third as much in farm payments as those states. Why this occurs is a mixture of politics and agricultural policies held over from the Depression. It reinforces the need for California to have a Farm Bill for the future, a Farm Bill for the 21st century.

Imagine what a 21st century Farm Bill could achieve:

It could keep our national agricultural industry innovative by providing a vision of agriculture not only five years from now but 25 to 30 years ahead. It could invest in the future by looking at innovative approaches in conservation, research and nutrition. It could also emphasize the long-term prosperity of agriculture and rural communities through more research and development investment.

Farmers and ranchers, especially those in California, need to be innovative to survive in a highly competitive world. Why should our national agricultural cornerstone, the Farm Bill, not be as innovative?

As Congress moves forward in developing the 2007 Farm Bill, I cannot emphasize enough the important role that all of us can play by being active within the Farm Bill process. Your input as innovators in the agricultural industry, representing the largest and most diverse agricultural state in the nation, is vital to our future.

As California's Farm Bill Listening Sessions occur over the next four weeks I hope that you will join us in crafting a Farm Bill for the 21st century, a Farm Bill that celebrates the innovative spirit of California.

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Top